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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: YUSHCHENKO IMPRESSES AUSTRIANS DURING VISIT

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Carol van Voorst for reasons 1.5(b) and (d).

1. (U) During a July 12-13 visit to Austria, Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko met with Austrian President Heinz Fischer, Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel, parliamentary leaders, and a group of Austrian businessmen. Ukraine's efforts to integrate more closely with the European Union featured prominently in all of the meetings. Austrian and Ukrainian officials said both governments agreed to intensify cooperation on law enforcement issues, especially money laundering, corruption, illegal immigration, and drug trafficking. In exchange for improved Ukrainian attention to illegal immigration, Yushchenko reportedly asked the EU to expedite visa issuances for legitimate Ukrainian businesspeople. The press reported that Yushchenko and Schuessel discussed strengthening EU-Ukrainian border security cooperation in the context of Austria's EU Presidency during the first half of 2006. Ukraine's Naftogas and the Austrian gas and oil giant, OMV, signed an agreement allowing for deep-water gas exploration in the Black Sea.

2. (C) During a July 15 meeting with Acting Econ-Pol Counselor, Josef Litschauer, Head of the MFA's CIS Unit, said Yushchenko's Austrian interlocutors had been highly impressed with him. According to Litschauer, Yushchenko did not push for accelerated EU membership for Ukraine, as some had expected he would. He told Schuessel that he recognized the process would be long and that Ukraine "would have to do the heavy-lifting itself." However, during a press conference, Foreign Minister Tarasyuk opined that Ukraine would carefully consider whether to put forward an official accession request during Austria's EU Presidency.

3. (C) Litschauer noted that under the Austrian EU Presidency, there would be an initial review of progress on the EU-Ukrainian Action Plan. The Ukrainians, in Litschauer's opinion, seemed to understand that the Action Plan necessitated "a lot of hard work." According to Litschauer, Yushchenko raised the possibility of Ukraine receiving market economy status by the end of 2005, which would be necessary before concluding a free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU. Yushchenko expressed optimism that the EU and Ukraine could sign an FTA in 2006.

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